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Correspondence respecting the conditions of diet and nutrition in the internment camp at Ruhleben.

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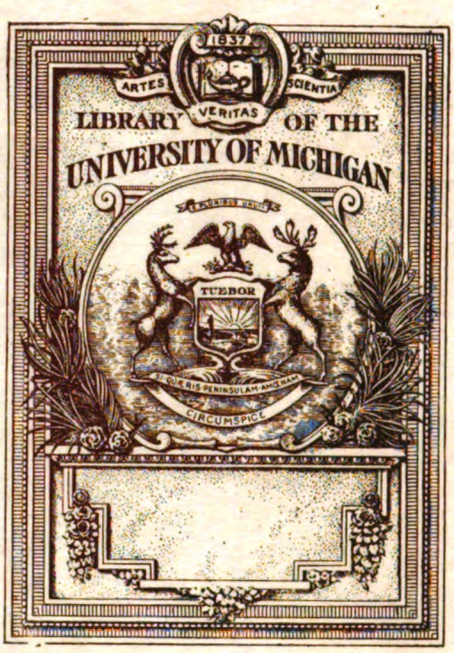

THE GIFT OF
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MISCELLANEOUS. No. 25 (1916).

FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE

RESPECTING THE

CONDITIONS OF DIET AND NUTRITION IN THE INTERNMENT CAMP AT RUHLEBEN AND THE PROPOSED RELEASE OF INTERNED CIVILIANS.

[In continuation of "Miscellaneous, No. 21 (1916)": Cd. 8262.]

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.
July 1916.

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Further Correspondence respecting the Conditions of Diet and Nutrition in the Internment Camp at Ruhleben and the proposed Release of Interned Civilians.

[In continuation of "Miscellaneous, No. 21 (1916)": Cd. 8262.]

C 9217

No. 1.

Mr. Page, United States Ambassador at London, to Sir Edward Grey.—(Received July 9.)

THE American Ambassador presents his compliments to His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and, with reference to the note Sir Edward Grey was good enough to address to Mr. Page on the 23rd June* concerning the food supply to British civilians interned at Ruhleben, has the honour to enclose herewith a copy of a letter, dated the 4th instant, from the Ambassador at Berlin together with a copy of the *note verbale* from the German Government upon which was based the telegram communicated to Sir E. Grey, on the 5th instant, respecting the feeding of these prisoners and the proposed release of British and German civilians interned in Germany and Great Britain respectively.

American Embassy, London, July 8, 1916.

* See "Miscellaneous, No. 21 (1916)," No. 6.

Enclosure 1 in No. 1.

Mr. Gerard to Mr. Page.

Sir, *American Embassy, Berlin, July* 4, 1916.

WITH reference to my telegram of to-day's date, as well as to your communication of the 28th ultimo, enclosing a copy of the British Foreign Office's note of the 23rd June, in regard to food conditions at Ruhleben and the proposal for the release of all the British civilians interned in that camp, I have the honour to transmit herewith an original copy of a note from the Imperial Foreign Office, dated the 2nd instant, of which a copy will also be forwarded to the Department of State at Washington.

I have, &c.
JAMES W. GERARD.

Enclosure 2 in No. 1.

Note verbale.

(Translation.)

WITH reference to the United States Embassy's notes of the 10th, 14th, 16th, 19th, 21st, and 26th ultimo, relative to the treatment of the British subjects interned at Ruhleben, and to a proposal for their release, the Foreign Office have the honour to reply as follows:—

The German Government emphatically repudiate the suggestion of the British Government that they do not fully recognise their obligations in the matter of

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providing food for their prisoners. There is equally little truth in the statement made by the British Government that the allowance of food supplied to British civilian prisoners is reckoned according to a lower standard than that supplied to British prisoners of war, the fact being that the regulations governing the feeding of prisoners are uniform for all classes. Moreover, the report by Dr. Taylor, transmitted by the British Government, will be carefully verified and the result communicated in due time [? "worden" for "werden" in German text]. As regards Dr. Taylor, it may be observed that on the occasions of his visits to the camp-kitchens he has frequently addressed to the officer in charge of the arrangements for the feeding of the prisoners appreciative remarks concerning the quality of the food.

The proposal that collective parcels should be allowed to be sent to Mr. Powell, the captain of the camp, for the benefit of those prisoners who receive no private parcels, as requested by the British Government, has received the consent of the military authorities. Such parcels must not, however, contain a preponderant proportion of those forms of food which the German nation are debarred from obtaining, except in limited quantities, as the result of the starvation campaign waged by Great Britain.

Should the British Government, as a measure of retaliation, introduce any restrictions whatsoever in the rations issued to German civilian prisoners interned in England, the German military authorities will be obliged not only to withdraw permission for the receipt of collective parcels, but also to prohibit the receipt of private parcels of every description, and to regulate the camp fare in Germany to correspond with the British restrictions.

The German Government are not opposed in principle to the British proposal for the release of all British civilian prisoners. The project could not, however, be carried out on the basis of making the release of the British prisoners dependent upon the release of a similar number of German prisoners interned in England, as such an exchange would, in the first place, meet with insuperable difficulties in connection with the selection of the German prisoners who should benefit by the arrangement. The suggestion could only be carried into effect if all interned persons in both countries were to be set free and granted permission to leave the country.

The German Government reserve a further communication relative to the details of an agreement on this basis, and would suggest, in the meantime, that a statement should be transmitted from the British Government regarding their general attitude towards this proposal.

Berlin, July 2, 1916.

No. 2.

Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Page.

THE Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs presents his compliments to the United States Ambassador, and has the honour to acknowledge the receipt of his Excellency's notes of the 5th and 8th instant, respecting the diet of the British civilians interned at Ruhleben, and the question of their exchange.

Sir E. Grey notes that the German Government repudiate the assertion of His Majesty's Government that they do not recognise their obligation to feed the prisoners properly, and that the civilians receive smaller rations than the military prisoners. He also notes that the German Government are verifying Dr. Taylor's report and will communicate the result in due course.

His Majesty's Government await with interest the conclusions of the German Government in regard to this matter. They have full confidence that the enquiry will completely bear out the conclusions arrived at by Dr. Taylor.

With regard to the question of the exchange of British and German civilian prisoners of war, His Majesty's Government would be unable to agree to the repatriation of all the German civilians interned in this country in exchange for all the British civilians interned in Germany, as this would involve the release of about 26,000 Germans in exchange for about 4,000 British subjects.

In these circumstances, His Majesty's Government will be obliged if Mr. Gerard will be good enough to renew to the German Government the proposal already made to them, namely, that all civilians, on both sides, over the age of 50 years shall be repatriated, as also those over 45 years who are unfit for service in the field, with the

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exception of certain persons to be retained for military reasons. To that proposal His Majesty's Government would now add that the persons so retained shall not exceed twenty on each side; and, further, that the remaining British civilians, wherever interned, including the merchant seamen of all classes who are not embodied in His Majesty's naval forces, and the retired British officers, and an equal number of German civilians, shall be interned in a neutral country.

Sir E. Grey will be glad to receive at as early a date as possible the reply of the German Government to the above proposals, and ventures to hope that Mr. Page will transmit them to Mr. Gerard by telegraph.

Foreign Office, July 18, 1916.

No. 3.

Mr. Page to Sir Edward Grey.—(Received July 18.)

THE American Ambassador presents his compliments to His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and has the honour to transmit herewith enclosed a copy of a letter he has received from the Ambassador at Berlin, dated the 28th ultimo, regarding the housing of the prisoners of war at the camp at Ruhleben.

American Embassy, London, July 17, 1916.

Enclosure in No. 3.

Mr. Gerard to Mr. Page.

Sir, *American Embassy, Berlin, June* 28, 1916.

THE reports of Dr. Taylor, our food expert, already sent to you, give in detail conditions of the food supply in Ruhleben.

I regret to state that practically no improvement in the housing of the prisoners has been made. The barracks at Ruhleben are overcrowded. The Imperial authorities, after nearly two years of war, have certainly had ample time to provide accommodation for the prisoners. It is intolerable that people of education should be herded six together in a horse's stall, and in some of the lofts the bunks touch one another. The light for reading is bad, and reading is a necessity if these poor prisoners are to be detained during another winter.

In the hay-lofts above the stables conditions are even worse. For example, in Barrack No. 2 one half-section of the loft is, at the centre, about 10 feet from the floor from the highest point, and the loft slopes downwards, so that at the sides it is only 4½ feet above the floor. The floor of this part of the loft is about 10·20 metres by 12·80 metres. The beds are so close together that they touch. In this confined space sixty-four men live. The light from the little windows is so faint that prisoners' eyes will be seriously injured, if the sight is not permanently lost, and this semi-darkness will undoubtedly cause depression and mental trouble.

The heating system should be improved and provision made for the drying of clothes by radiators or a drying-room in each barrack. The prisoners are obliged to answer roll calls outside, often in the rain, and have no means of drying their soaked garments.

Many things, such as soap, usually issued to prisoners, even in gaols, I am informed, have never been given to the prisoners at Ruhleben. Various authorities from time to time have promised that the housing would be bettered. The present conditions should no longer prevail; during another winter they will be impossible.

The camp authorities, who, I am satisfied, do all in their power to better conditions, have no authority to make these needed improvements, but the conditions I describe must be evident to any inspector acting on behalf of such authorities as may be above the camp commander.

I have, &c.
JAMES W. GERARD.

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No. 4.

Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Page.

THE Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs presents his compliments to the United States Ambassador and has the honour to refer to his Excellency's note of the 17th instant enclosing a copy of a despatch from the United States Ambassador at Berlin respecting the conditions obtaining at the camp at Ruhleben.

Sir E. Grey learns with much concern that the conditions under which the prisoners are interned are in many respects extremely unsatisfactory.

It would appear that practically no improvement in the housing of the prisoners has been made, that six men are still housed in one horse-box, which, as Mr. Gerard says, is intolerable, and that the light for reading is bad. Unfortunately the conditions in the hay-lofts seem to be even worse than those prevailing in the boxes, one loft is only 4½ feet high at the sides and sixty-four men are crowded into a space 10·20 metres by 12·80 metres. The loft is in semi-darkness. The effect on the mental and physical state of the prisoners of such conditions is too obvious to need comment. Sir E. Grey had hoped that the construction of six new barracks referred to in Mr. Gerard's despatch enclosed in Mr. Page's note of the 21st May, 1915, had removed cause for serious complaint as regards overcrowding, and he learns with great regret that this is not the case.

Sir E. Grey entirely agrees with Mr. Gerard as to the need for the provision of a drying room in each barrack. He does not, however, think that the German authorities could be pressed to provide soap, as it is not provided free of charge in the internment camps in this country.

Sir E. Grey trusts that an arrangement will be arrived at with the German Government for the release of all the British civilians interned in Germany, but as the necessary negotiations may require some time he would be much obliged if Mr. Gerard would represent to the German Government the deplorable conditions prevailing at Ruhleben as regards overcrowding, and urge them to take immediate steps to provide more accommodation for the prisoners. Sir E. Grey thinks that the erection of tents would be a satisfactory method of dealing with the matter, pending the construction of new barracks.

Foreign Office, July 21, 1916.

* See "Miscellaneous, No. 14 (1915)," No. 20.

No. 5.

Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Page.

THE Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs presents his compliments to the United States Ambassador, and has the honour to refer to Sir E. Grey's note of the 21st instant respecting the conditions obtaining at the camp at Ruhleben.

In that note it was stated that Sir E. Grey did not consider that the German authorities could be pressed to provide soap for prisoners of war interned at Ruhleben as it is not provided free of charge in the internment camps in this country.

Sir E. Grey would be much obliged if the United States Ambassador at Berlin could be informed that the above statement is incorrect. The fact is that soap and towels are supplied free to military and civilian prisoners of war interned in this country.

Foreign Office, July 25, 1916.

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